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BOOK REVIEWS

Practical Nature-Study. By JOHN M. COULTER, JOHN G. COULTER, AND ALICE JEAN PATTERSON. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1909.

It seems to the reviewer that there are few problems in education today which are more pressing than that of nature-study in the elementary school. Scientific knowledge and the scientific method of thought are playing a very large part in modern life, and they deserve to play a much larger part than they do. At the same time with the growth of cities, a larger and larger proportion of the people are being removed from daily contact with wild nature as it existed in the past—a contact that doubtless meant more educationally than many realize. These conditions make it imperative that the nature-study problem be given serious attention by all who are concerned in general education, for as long as nature-study remains in its present chaotic condition, everyone who thinks seriously about it must admit that the schools are failing to answer a very evident and a very important demand.

This little book written jointly by Dr. John M. Coulter, Dr. John G. Coulter, and Miss Alice Jean Patterson is, to my mind, the most sensible and helpful publication along this line that has yet appeared. It does not claim to be a final solution of the problem, but merely an aid in that direction. It deserves to be widely read and studied and used by teachers and superintendents, and if this is done, a long step will be taken toward giving this important subject the kind of place that it ought to have in the schools.

The book consists of four parts. Part I deals in a general way with different phases of the subject under the following headings: "Nature-Study and Agriculture," "The Training of the Working Teacher," "The Mission of Nature-Study," "The Dangers of Nature-Study," "The Principles of Nature-Study," "The Spirit of Nature-Study," and "The Child and Nature-Study."

The first chapter deals with a subject concerning which many people appear at the present time to be misinformed. We hear much talk about nature-study having proved a failure, and elementary agriculture being a subject worthy to take its place because it is nearer to life. On this point, the authors say: "Elementary agriculture can get no nearer to life than nature-study should, and nature-study aims to get near to a broader if not higher aspect of life than pertains to agriculture alone." In the chapter entitled, "The Mission of Nature-Study" the educative results of nature-study are summed up as follows: "A sustained interest in natural objects and the phenomena of nature; independence in observation and inference; some conception of what an exact statement is; some conception of what constitutes proof." Under the last statement, the authors make the following remarks: "This is the crying need of the men and women of today who make and hold the most impossible connection between cause and effect. It is in this very broad field that charlatanism of every sort flourishes like a noxious weed, and unless this situation is changed through the schools, the dupes will continue to multiply. . . . Nature-study presents unrivaled oppor-

tunity for training in proof, for it is found that a single observation is rarely trustworthy and that additional facts are apt to modify conclusions."

The first chapter in Part II consists of a "Topical Outline by Grades and Seasons," and is the course used at present in the Training School of the Illinois State Normal University. The course is the result of a gradual evolution from a beginning made in 1892 by Dr. Charles A. and Mrs. Lida B. McMurtry. Since that time, Professor B. P. Colton, C. W. Whitten, J. P. Stewart, and Miss Alice Jean Patterson have each had a hand in bringing it to its present form. The course has thus been worked out in a practical way under the most favorable circumstances and is one of the most efficient courses in the subject that has yet been arranged. It should be an exceedingly helpful guide to any teacher endeavoring to handle the subject. The second chapter of Part II consists of a series of typical lesson plans which should be very helpful in giving inexperienced teachers the method of procedure.

Part III contains an "Outline in Nature-Study and Elementary Agriculture for Rural Schools" and twenty-six other short chapters on various topics mostly designed to give the teacher of nature-study a necessary fund of information and further to illustrate the method of attack. It is in some of these chapters that certain material is introduced which is, to my mind, of questionable value. An illustration of this is the chapter entitled, "Selecting, Judging, and Storing of Seed Corn." Selecting seed corn is neither science nor nature-study, but rather an art which rests on science. The crucial question in this whole matter is: "Shall we teach the arts in the schools, or shall we teach the science which underlies the arts?" If the chapter had been headed "Heredity," much of the same material could have been used and the same practical benefit derived, but the goal would have been a principle, a general notion with many applications, instead of a particular notion of how to do one particular thing for which many of the children will have no use in actual life.

Part IV of the book is not essentially different in its nature from Part III except that the material suggested is adapted to the upper grades.

I predict for the book on the whole a very wide influence, and believe that it will lead to a careful observation of the work that is now being done in the Training School of the Illinois State Normal University, which, I judge, largely inspired the writing of the book.

J. L. PRICER

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Changing Conceptions of Education. By ELLWOOD P. CUBBERLEY. "River-side Educational Monographs." New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909. Pp. 70. Price 35 cents.

In the introduction to this work it is stated: "In these days when some of our educational workers are doubting the power of educational history to give practical guidance to the teacher, it is a particular pleasure to offer this illuminating historical treatment of the problem of educational reconstruction." The material is presented in three sections: I, "Changes in the Nature of Our Life;" II, "Changes in the Conception of the School;" III, "New Conceptions and Present Tendencies."